

My Semester Abroad by Oladapo Okunlola

My name is Oladapo Okunlola I am a Business Informatics master student and I am here to write about my best ever semester which was spent abroad at the Smith School of Business at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. I initially chose Canada for exchange because it was a country where I always wanted to study in. I also chose it because my older sister and my younger brother both live in Canada as well. As a result of my siblings living there, I knew a bit about Canada but I did not know much about the city the university is based in – Kingston. Turns out Kingston is in a perfect location as it is located in Ontario and is just two and a half hours' drive from Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal as well as five hours drive from Niagara Falls and about six hours from New York state. Five hours may seem like a long drive but in a country as large as Canada that is pretty close. For example, my brother lives four hours by PLANE from Toronto even though he lives in the same country.

One thing I should mention about anyone who is trying to go to Smith is that it is EXTREMELY difficult to find a place to live (especially if you are only going there for the fall semester) as the university does not provide housing for exchange students and because the city itself is small with a large amount of the population being students. Therefore, it was important to start looking for housing as soon as possible. There was a Facebook group called Queen's University – Off Campus Housing where people posted rooms/apartments to rent. Unfortunately, some of the posting were scammers since the university did not vet anyone posting ads. Therefore, I had to do due diligence to make sure the housing was real by doing a skype call to make sure the house is real. The university had dormitories but those were massively overpriced at over \$1000 a month for a room, you also had to share the bathroom with an entire floor and the dormitories do not have a full kitchen as they want you to purchase their meal plan which isn't even included in the \$1000 a month fee. Luckily, I found a place about twenty-five mins walk from campus quite early on that was a little cheaper than the dormitory price.

Now that that's out of the way, let me talk about the exchange. Queen's University was among the most beautiful campus I have ever been to as well as one of the biggest. On its 100 acre campus you can find eighteen different dormitories, sport fields, numerous faculty building, a humongous

gym with six floors (that was free for students) and had everything from conditioning equipments, to swimming pools to basketball, squash, and badminton courts. The campus also had several libraries including the Douglas library which has a main study area called the “Harry Potter room” because it looked like the great hall at Hogwarts. The campus also had several student clubs, which have their own buildings. I ended up joining the African and Caribbean Student Association as well as the Film Club where we meet once a week to watch classic films and then have a discussion about them.



The Harry Potter Room in Douglas Library



One of the many streets on campus. This is to get a view of how the campus typically looks like

In regards to the academics. Even though I was a Business Informatics student I found myself taking MBA courses as that was the only one the school offered at Masters level. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the MBA program was among the best in the country. Overall there were twenty-five exchange students in the MBA program (the regular MBA students were about eighty) and about ninety in the undergrad Commerce program. As we both studied at the Smith Business School our orientation day involved both commerce and MBA exchange students. During the orientation day we had a scavenger hunt across Kingston with the MBA student competing against the Commerce students. Unfortunately, the MBA students lost and did not win any prizes but we still had a blast. Furthermore, the MBA office gave each of us a goody bag with a card

holder, a Smith Business school flask with our names on it, a Smith water bottle, a leather luggage tag among other things.



Smith Flask with my name on it. One of the many items in the goody bag

The classes I took were Creating and Executing a Market Based-Strategy, Pricing Analytics, Decision Making in Competitive Environments and Strategic Implementation and Change. Each of those classes were among the most insightful I have ever had. The professors were expert in the fields and ranged on Ivy League faculty members to authors to CEOs of consulting firm. Additionally, the courses were very practical as it involved no tests or exams but rather projects. My favorite course was Market-Based strategy because it involved working with an actual Toronto-based company to help develop a strategy to help solve a real-life problem they had. This course single handedly ignited my love for consulting so much so that I joined the Budapest Consulting Club as soon as I came back to Corvinus University. I also loved Decision Making as well because the professor (who used to teach at Princeton University) gave away money to people



The Smith Business School where my classes took place

who won the in-class “games” which were based on game theory topics. Pricing Analytics and Strategic Implementation were very informative as well. What I loved the most was that the professors not only educated us but they made the courses fun and exciting. Additionally, the MBA program is extremely team oriented, every assignment was done within a team as they felt this was representative of the workplace. Another thing I should note was that when it comes to presentations, the MBA class usually dressed in suits which I respect but it also meant I had to buy a

suit in Kingston. The only thing I did not particularly like was the fact that we had to pay \$125 dollars per course for study materials that mainly consisted of papers the school could have simply emailed to us. Therefore, since I took four courses, I had to pay \$500 for study materials.



MBA Classroom. I love how it looked like a conference room.



Dinner with classmates which was paid for the professor. He did this so the exchange students and the regular students could get to know one another.



Selfie with My Team Before Presenting a Strategy to a Company

Despite this, there were a number of perks to studying with the MBA class besides the quality education. They include having a dedicated staff in MBA office who are there to help you if you had any issues. We also had an entire section in the business school for us which included a kitchen, team rooms that had lockers, a big screen television and boardroom-like tables because the course was very team-oriented. We were all given key fobs and we were the only ones allowed in those rooms which meant any items we left there was usually safe. Even the individual team rooms could only be accessed by the team members. We also went on MBA sponsors trips and events such as

canoeing, axe throwing as well as curling none of which I had ever done before. Unfortunately, while I had fun curling, I was absolutely rubbish in it and often let my team down, however, I was amazing in axe throwing and my team came in second place in the class competition. Other trips sponsored by the MBA office included Fright night where the historical Fort Henry was transformed into a haunted castle filled with jump scares.



My Axe Throwing and Curling Team. My performance Axe Throwing was better than my curling.

The university also had something called QUIC (Queen's University International Center) who also organized trips for us (at a cost) to places such as Niagara Falls, Montreal and Ottawa. Out of those three, I only went to the trip to Niagara Falls and although we were only there for a couple hours it was enough time to take the boat trip right up to the falls itself which was scary and exhilarating. Another trip organized by QUIC was an afternoon trip to a farm where we were allowed to pick and buy our own pumpkins to take home and carve ourselves. The pumpkin carving was something I was excited about as I have never done it before despite watching it a lot on television.



Niagara Falls Trip: We took the boat tour up to the falls. Let's just say we needed the raincoats because by the time we were done we completely drenched in water.

In terms of social life, Kingston is a relatively small city so the options were limited. A lot of people went to the national parks nearby the city. Kingston also have a couple fairs such as the rib fest, the poutine festival as well as a fall fair with rides. Some of these were events I usually saw on television so it was nice to experience. In terms of night life, the city only had two clubs that were above average that all close at 2 am which is the exact opposite compared to a city like Budapest. Nevertheless, the student population made up of a sizable amount of the city so naturally there was a lot of house parties in typical North American fashion which was nice to experience. One of the biggest social event of the year at Queen's University is Homecoming Day or "Hoco" as the local students call it. On this day, the alumni from years ending in 4s and 9s (example 2014, 1999) visited the university and there were events such as sport matches, shows etc. However, most students use it as a day of partying. The MBA student body organized 9 am pancakes and beer with various drinking games, by 12 pm we went off to watch a football (American style) game between Queen's and a rival, by 3 pm we went to watch a rugby and later on that night you could party on the main university avenue or go to one the nightclubs.



Homecoming was a lot of fun

As mentioned before, Kingston was two and a half hours away from Toronto so a lot of my “travelling” simply involved going to Toronto with my classmates. One of my most memorable nights involving driving to watch a Toronto Raptors game who were the NBA champions. This was special because I am a fan of sports and it was always on my bucket list to watch a NBA game. I was also able to visit iconic places in Toronto such as the CN Tower which has a break taking view from the top as well as the Ripley’s Aquarium



My first ever NBA game. Toronto Raptors vs Orlando Magic and the Raptors won!!



All in all, the four months I spent in Kingston, Canada were moments I would never forget. The courses I took and the professors there shaped my future career goal for which I will always be grateful for. I also got to meet people from all over the world and forge friendships that I feel will last for a very long time. I was also blessed to live in a house with four amazing housemates who were also exchange students. They made my stay even more enjoyable. In fact, in the 2 months since I have been back, I've met two of my ex-classmates and one of my housemates already. I am truly appreciative of the opportunity for me to study at the Queen's University and my only regret was not staying there for an extra semester.



Picking Pumpkins



Carving Pumpkins



The MBA Exchange Students at Smith Business School. There were 25 of us in total.